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Balky Australia freed of MX testing

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WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration yesterday suddenly freed Australia from its agreement to provide support facilities for MX missile tests, heading off a second rapid-fire revolt within the ranks of the major South Pacific alliance.

The move came on the eve of a

meeting between President Reagan and Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke, and followed New Zealand's refusal earlier this week to allow a port visit by a U.S. Navy destroyer possibly carrying nuclear arms.

It was a piece of diplomatic finessing, designed to limit the damage to the alliance of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States

(ANZUS), to keep Australia firmly wedded to overall U.S. strategic policies and to relieve Mr. Hawke — basically a strong ally — of the burden of having to renege on a bilateral agreement.

Had Secretary of State George P. Shultz not decided to forgo Australia's commitment to provide backup

facilities for the MX testing, Mr. Hawke, facing a political revolt within his Labor Party over the MX tests, was ready to cancel the agreement anyway.

"That issue never came up," said a smiling Mr. Hawke after lunching at the State Department with Mr. Shultz, who stressed the warmth of both the political and personal friendship with Mr. Hawke.

Mr. Shultz said the two had reviewed the MX missile testing program, and the U.S. side, aware of the concerns inside Australia, had volunteered to find other ways of monitoring the tests in the Tasman Sea with-

out relying on Australian facilities.

Two days ago in Brussels, Mr. Hawke told Australian journalists traveling with him that he had decided to opt out of the MX agreement, originally made by his Liberal predecessor, Malcolm Fraser. The agreement was leaked to the press in Melbourne in the wake of New Zealand's defiance and created an immediate furor.

New Zealand's defection from the alliance's basic undertaking to facilitate port calls by allied shipping — because the United States refused to say if the destroyer Buchanan was nuclear-armed — brought a stern warning Tuesday from the administration that such action would not be

"cost-free."

Administration officials yesterday indicated that the direct reprisals were likely to be limited to such security-oriented areas as intelligence swapping and military aid.

One senior official described New Zealand as "an inadequately functioning ally," but added, "We are not in a punitive or sanctioning mode."

Mr. Shultz said yesterday: "We have a great deal of affection for the people of New Zealand, but we also remind them that those who value freedom have to be willing to be prepared to defend it."

He said the United States and Australia would work out "in due course" how and when to "move for-

ward."

In New Zealand, Labor Prime Minister David Lange said that New Zealand's determination to remain a nuclear-free country would not weaken under U.S. pressure.

On Capitol Hill, Senator William S. Cohen (R, Maine) suggested that the pressure should include economic as well as security measures.

A confrontation with Australia would have been of a more dramatic dimension that the spat with New Zealand. Australia provides the United States with one of its most sensitive spy-satellite tracking stations, a key link in its submarine communications system and a staging post for B-52 training flights.